



News Release

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Shellfish biotoxin detected at unsafe levels for first time in Washington waters

Toxin cannot be cooked out of contaminated shellfish

OLYMPIA — State health officials warn that a type of biotoxin never before found in Washington shellfish has been detected in shellfish from the Sequim Bay area. The discovery led to a commercial and recreational harvest closure in Sequim Bay, and people are urged not to eat shellfish from that area until further notice due to the risk of Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning (DSP). A recall was conducted for commercially sold products from the area dating back to August 1; all recalled product has been accounted for and is not currently on the market.

This is the first time in Washington or the United States that DSP toxin has been found above acceptable food safety limits. Since this is new to the state, the Department of Health is sampling and testing shellfish areas throughout the state to learn more about it. New information will be shared as it is received.

This biotoxin has been a problem in several European countries for some time and was recently found in British Columbia waters. The Department of Health Office of Shellfish and Water Protection has suspected the biotoxin may become a concern in Washington waters. The program is working with federal partners and the University of Washington on this emerging issue in order to protect public health. As environmental monitoring was underway, we learned of illnesses matching the description of DSP in a local family. Shellfish samples were tested at the federal Food and Drug Administration lab, which confirmed presence of the toxin.

Unlike bacterial contamination, DSP is a toxin, so it is not killed by cooking. Eating shellfish contaminated with DSP may cause Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning, a foodborne illness. DSP can cause diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps and chills, very similar to gastrointestinal or stomach flu type symptoms. If you eat DSP-tainted shellfish, symptoms could begin within a few hours and last one to three days at the most.

— More —

The [Office of Shellfish and Water Protection](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/default-sf.htm) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/default-sf.htm>) provides updated information on shellfish safety, warnings, closures and restrictions for [locations throughout the state](#) (ww4.doh.wa.gov/scripts/esrimap.dll?name=bioview&Cmd=Map&Step=1).

The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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